

Downtown Improvement Committee

Meeting Minutes September 9th, 2016

1. Call to Order and Welcome

A regular meeting of the Nashua Downtown Improvement Committee was called to order at 7:50 A.M. on August 12, 2016 in Nashua City Hall, Room 208 by Chairman Marylou Blaisdell.

Members Present: Marylou Blaisdell, Richard Lannan, Sy Mahfuz, Alderman Brian McCarthy, Simon Sarris, Ron LaFleur, John Koutsos, Tia Phillips.

City Staff: Tim Cummings, James Vayo Members of the public: Paul Shea

2. Approval of August 12th, 2016 Meeting Minutes

J. Koutsos requests corrections to the meeting minutes and that they are not made public until approved by the Downtown Improvement Committee.

M. Blaisdell additionally expresses a desire that the meeting minutes be held until approved by the Downtown Improvement Committee.

M. Blaisdell asks about the rules for non-public session at the end regular meetings.

B. McCarthy notes there are very specific rules on why non-public session can be held.

J. Vayo provides clarification on the Right-to-Know law for the timing for draft meeting minutes to be generally available to the public.

**MOTION BY M. BLAISDELL TO TABLE AUGUST 12th MEETING MINUTES FOR CORRECTIONS,
SECONDED BY J. KOUTSOS AND APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. Funding for Main Street Holiday Lights

M. Blaisdell describes the efforts of the Holiday Lighting Committee in planning for additional holiday lights for downtown. She notes that GAD is requesting surplus parking revenue to install garland for the Main Street light poles. The cost for the lit garland is anticipated to cost \$9,720.

S. Sarris asks how long the holiday decorations will be put up on Main Street.

R. Lannan notes the garland should stay up for approximately 6 weeks and should last three to four years. R. Lannan also notes the cost of the garland being less than \$10,000 should ease the approval of the expense.

M. Blaisdell notes she spoke with B. Clemons regarding the procedure for expenditures of allocations of the Downtown Improvement Committee.

B. McCarthy notes that expenditures under \$10,000 can happen without further approval by the Board of Alderman.

T. Cummings notes the need for clear communication between the Downtown Improvement Committee, the Mayor, and the Board of Alderman. T. Cummings would like the Downtown Improvement Committee to establish a process for communication of recommendations for expenditures.

M. Blaisdell notes in past years the Downtown Improvement Committee would create a budget and provide their recommendations to the Mayor. This is the first year the committee has not done so. She suggests sending a letter to the Finance Committee with their recommendations for expenditures.

B. McCarthy notes the letter will go to the Mayor and the Mayor will present it to the Board of Alderman.

S. Mahfuz asks about the difference between LED and Incandescent bulbs.

P. Shea provides explanation of why incandescent bulbs were selected for garland and banner enhancers. P. Shea notes there was a general preference from the Holiday Light Committee for the quality of light which came out of the incandescent bulbs.

R. Lannan provides rationale for the cost of the storage containers.

B. McCarthy notes the cost for storage containers is incorrect in Paul's estimate.

S. Mahfuz asks about the plan for summer storage of the holiday materials.

J. Koutsos offers space in the basement of the Edward Jones building on Main Street.

MOTION BY R. LANNAN FOR THE COMMITTEE TO RECOMMEND EXPENDITURE OF \$9,720 FROM THE CY14 BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR HANGING FLOWERS TO GREAT AMERICAN DOWNTOWN FOR THE PURCHASE OF HOLIDAY GARLAND. MOTION SECONDED BY J. KOUTSOS AND APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. Funding for Main Street Trolley

M. Blaisdell notes she spoke with Director Marchant regarding use of the trolley. Director Marchant provided Chair Blaisdell with ridership numbers. M. Blaisdell notes that there are few trolley tickets coming back to the City of Nashua as the restaurants wait staff have not been keeping the tickets. M. Blaisdell provides details regarding the ridership, hours of operation, and period for which the program is funded.

M. Blaisdell asks the committee for input regarding funding the Downtown Trolley program.

J. Vayo notes the reasoning for six months of funding is to allow for a full year of ridership data which the transit system could use to justify fully funding the trolley via federal operations funds.

R. Lannan asks how much the program needs to continue for the next six months.

M. Blaisdell notes the request from Director Marchant is for \$16,000.

B. McCarthy adds that he has asked Director Marchant about the potential to expand the service to include Saturday as this is one of the times that the larger numbers of people are downtown.

J. Vayo notes that several restaurants sponsored the trolley.

S. Mahfuz mentions that the large majority of merchants downtown do not benefit from the trolley and suggests that the restaurants should be partially funding the trolley.

B. McCarthy points out that the Downtown Improvement Committee funds are city funds and that parking money could have been in the general fund. The city decided to set aside funds for the downtown.

S. Mahfuz notes meter rates were raised to set aside funds for the committee.

T. Cummings notes the mission of the committee is to make recommendations to the Mayor for spending on behalf of the downtown. The recommendations of the committee should be in the best interest of the entire downtown.

S. Sarris is in support of funding the trolley due to its clear termination date.

J. Koutsos asks who will support the trolley program after the six months are up.

T. Cummings notes that the program could be funded through federal dollars with transit money.

J. Koutsos asks about the number of riders, likes to see people riding the trolley on Main Street. He asked if there was a frame of reference for the ridership numbers that were presented to the committee to gauge the success of the pilot program. He believes the trolley adds vitality to the Downtown.

B. McCarthy explains how the trolley was derived from proposed resolution for valet parking on Main Street.

T. Phillips asks about the timing of the funding. J. Vayo explains it is a factor of the offset between the city's fiscal year and the committee's calendar year.

MOTION BY R. LANNAN FOR THE COMMITTEE TO RECOMMEND EXPENDITURE OF \$16,000 FOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE DOWNTOWN TROLLEY PROGRAM THROUGH FISCAL YEAR 2017, MOTION SECONDED BY S. MAHFUZ AND APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

5. Parking Revenue Update

T. Cummings provides the committee with information about the revenue to date for this calendar year, notes that the revenue is approximately \$54,000 higher than the previous year.

6. Wayfinding and Signage RFP Update

J. Vayo provides the committee with an explanation of timeline for kick-off of work with GPI Engineering as the contract with GPI was signed this week. J. Vayo notes the Downtown Improvement Committee can anticipate seeing a presentation from GPI Engineering in October or November.

7. Downtown Market Analysis

J. Vayo provides a description of the process of generating a market analysis and how the data can be utilized to develop a strategy. J. Vayo mentions some strategies used in other communities which may be useful in Downtown Nashua.

J. Vayo asks if there is interest from the committee in designating a committee member to participate in a small working group with a city staff and an Alderman to draft a scope of work for a market analysis.

J. Vayo states the exploration of a market analysis was derived from the priorities identified during the 2016 Downtown survey as well as through discussions of the committee regarding the vacancy of a downtown retail anchor on Main Street.

S. Sarris notes it is hard to know what the value of a market analysis but notes it may be very useful.

M. Blaisdell offers to forward some market analysis RFP's which were provided to her by J. Vayo.

J. Vayo offers to provide some end product Market Analysis to the committee as they will be more useful than the RFP's.

S. Sarris expresses concern about the market analysis note being utilized once the work is complete or not being able to utilize the report due to outside factors.

J. Vayo explains the analysis will explicitly identify if more or less money is being spent in each specific market sector and how downtown has the potential to recapture spending for growth.

J. Koutsos feels the analysis by a city is not of value to the business sector and would rather see funds go towards physical improvements to downtown. John Koutsos feels that funding physical improvements that enhance the appearance of the Downtown are a better use of excess parking revenue rather than a market study.

S. Mahfuz notes that private businesses, especially larger brands, are going to pay for their own market analysis and what the city produces will not be as useful.

M. Blaisdell mentions the Performing Arts Feasibility Study as an effort that is already underway.

P. Shea reminds the committee of the trips to other downtowns which took place last year and the desires to attract business types which exist in other communities to our own downtown. He notes that the market analysis would validate the opportunities for new business to take place here.

R. Lannan notes he would rather see funds go towards physical improvements to the downtown. He also asks how much the analysis would cost, if \$3,000 to \$5,000 he would not be opposed to such an effort at this time.

J. Vayo notes a good market analysis could be utilized by any future downtown master plan updates and that if done well, a market analysis may inform priorities for physical improvements which would be included in an update to the downtown master plan.

J. Vayo notes the analysis will have lasting positive implications for economic welfare of downtown and would likely cost between \$13,000 and \$18,000.

B. McCarthy asks if a downtown market analysis should happen as part of a city wide market analysis. Is there another way to fund a market study?

M. Blaisdell concurs with the sentiments of Alderman McCarthy.

B. McCarthy notes that his understanding is that real estate holders along the retail corridors of Nashua are interested in contributing funds to a city wide effort.

T. Cummings relates to the sentiments of J. Vayo's efforts, asks if there is an ambition by this committee to prioritize the marketing and recruitment of business to downtown? If not, there are likely other ways to spend money.

J. Vayo notes there are risks to a city wide market analysis of the priorities of downtown being lost in a city wide market analysis.

T. Cummings notes discretionary income is low in the areas surrounding downtown and as such the three will be low leakage and the priority needs to be on correcting the lack of discretionary spending downtown.

B. McCarthy notes that there are several market rate residential developments underway in downtown now which should add new discretionary income.

J. Vayo notes a market analysis can predict the need for new business with the addition of new spending power in downtown.

R. Lannan feels an action plan needs to be in place to immediately follow the analysis.

T. Cummings notes the various methods in which economic development can follow through with the action plan & strategy of the market analysis, notes it is a large amount of work and a big commitment of time and effort.

M. Blaisdell noted there was a lot of work done in the downtown tours with little return

P. Shea notes that the outcomes of those tours may have been better if a report like this had been developed. A market analysis could reinforce steps taken towards downtown improvements.

J. Vayo notes a market analysis could be used by banks as independent validation of private analysis.

M. Blaisdell asks for this conversation to be continued at a later date.

R. Lannan asks if a list of downtown's with a market analysis can be compiled so the committee can make calls and get a feel from other downtowns for their value.

B. McCarthy feels physical improvements are more important at this time.

T. Cummings feel that the committee should note pursue a market analysis at this time. Notes the data will be valuable from the long term perspective to banks and developers, but there may not be an immediate return on investment.

The committee decides to continue discussion at a later date.

8. Other Business

M. Blaisdell notes the vacancy on Main Street is a concern for her.

T. Cummings notes he has had three different business approaches him about leasing vacant storefronts on Main Street but the rents were too high for them. The matter of filling storefronts largely is a private sector issue in which owners must come to agreement.

T. Cummings shares that the Telegraph is relocating to Downtown Nashua and bringing 70 new jobs to downtown.

The committee discusses the impacts of providing access to municipal parking to downtown businesses at a reduced rate.

9. Adjournment and Next Meeting

MOTION TO ADJORN THE MEETING MADE BY R. LANNAN AT 9:08AM. SECONDED BY S. SARRIS AND APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

The next meeting will take place on October 14th, 2016 at 7:45 a.m.